

It doesn't make sense for wildfires to start easily when Kentucky has had such a run of cold, wet weather but how wet or cold the ground is has little to do with how vulnerable dead grass is to a spark. "Despite recent precipitation, fine dead fuels like grass, leaves and twigs are rapidly dried with minimal sunlight and wind," said Leah MacSwords, director of the Division of Forestry.

Kentucky law designates Feb. 15 through April 30 as spring forest fire hazard season. During this time, it is illegal to burn anything within 150 feet of any woodland or brushland between the daylight hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Harsh temperatures mean drier vegetation, making it easier for a fire to start and spread. Even if the ground is so wet you can't walk without sinking, the vegetation on top of the ground is tinder just waiting for a spark to ignite. The division reports there have been 55 fires burning 1,506 acres since Jan. 1, 2014.

"This law is one of the most effective tools we have to prevent wildfires," said MacSwords. "Downed trees, branches and leaves from winter storms become 'forest fuels' that increase the danger of a forest fire. By adhering to the law and burning after 6 p.m., fires are less likely to escape and threaten people, their property and the forests of Kentucky.

People should contact the Target Arson Hotline at 1-800-27-ARSON if they witness any illegal burning.